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# CCTV of street prostitution in Switzerland

**At the beginning of 2005, a decision was taken to close off during the night-time the biggest street prostitution area in Switzerland, namely the 'Industriestrasse' in the city of Olten (17,000 inhabitants). Before however, it was not so much the prostitutes that made this street renowned, but three dome cameras that were installed in 2001 by local police forces. This project was not only meant to 'discipline' and make the street safer for prostitutes, but also to increase the image of the city as a whole by reducing its negative press headlines.**

The 'Industriestrasse' itself, forms a complex micro-cosmos bringing together various types of social groups within one precise locality. Besides street prostitution, cultural institutions (eg a music-club and a theatre), several big industrial complexes and various small enterprises border the street. Therefore, the Olten CCTV-case also illustrates the 'struggles for space' between different social players and interests linked to the use of surveillance cameras.

In order to critically evaluate changes of the quality and image of the street due to the installation of the cameras, 13 in depth-interviews with different types of street-users took place between 2002 and 2003.

This qualitative approach has been completed by a statistical study, based on data which had been collected with the aid of a public opinion survey. On this basis, it became possible to study video-surveillance not only as it is understood and perceived by the population at large, but also by people directly in touch with the monitored localities. This opens then the question whether CCTV could revitalise urban areas suffering from social disadvantage by improving the subjective feelings of safety.

On a very general level, research results showed that video-surveillance may not be considered as an isolated device to improve the use and perception of places of fear over the long term. On the one hand, very little concern about CCTV as a threat to civil liberties has been expressed. On the other hand, people did not really seem to believe in the cameras either: police or private security forces were largely preferred to CCTV. In particular, privately used cameras looking at parts of public places were seen critically by the majority. Besides this, video-surveillance seems to have been forgotten very quickly.

In this context, most people described video-surveillance as a technical device which was at a far 'geometric and psychological distance'. The cameras remained completely unknown, 'staying in the background', and did not mean anything for them. As nobody ever heard about any positive success in detecting crime on prostitutes or passers-by, people lost confidence very quickly.

From this observation, one may deduce that video-surveillance as a preventive security device would need specific accompanying measures in order not to be forgotten so quickly. Transparent police

communication or measures that integrate concerned social groups within surveillance projects would improve the preventive efficiency of CCTV. In addition, more transparency in the communication of camera users would also reduce the risk of one being mistaken about the impacts of daily surveillance of one's practices within public places.